

‘Real-life Georgia O’Keefe Painting’, ‘Furburger’, ‘Mighty Man Noodle’, and ‘Vlad the Impaler’:  
Conceptual Metaphors for *Vagina* and *Penis*

The third wave of feminism aims to break down existing gender roles and categorization based solely on sex or gender, allowing for gender to be fluid and a choice/performance, rather than linked to biology (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). At the beginning of this movement, Cameron (1992) investigated the underlying cultural and conceptual constructs of gender and sexuality in her study of terms for *penis* generated by college-aged students. She organized the terms into metaphorical categories (e.g., TOOLS and ANIMALS), which are used to understand the world, mapping women’s and men’s place onto it (Lakoff 1987; 1993). Cameron found that the terms for *penis* fit into the overarching conceptual metaphors of SEX IS CONQUERING, MEN ARE DOMINANT, and WOMEN ARE PASSIVE.

The present study adapts Cameron’s methods to investigate if the conceptual metaphors for *penis* that surfaced in her study 25 years ago are still salient today. For comparison, terms for *vagina* were also collected. The data comes from 16 males and 36 females who responded to an online survey yielding a total of 461 terms for *penis* and 289 terms for *vagina*. When applicable, the terms for *penis* were put into metaphorical categories based on Cameron’s (1992) classifications; terms for *vagina* were categorized based on the semantic categories outlined in Braun and Kitzinger (2001). New metaphorical categories were created for terms that were not collected in either of these studies. Some of these new categories include OTHER BODY PARTS and PLANT LIFE for *penis* and EXCRETIONS, LOCATIONS (including EMPTY SPACE), DESIRED ITEMS, MONEY AND JEWELS, and SEDUCTION for *vagina*.

The data suggests that the terms for *vagina* are more pejorative than the terms for *penis*: 48% versus .04% respectively. The metaphorical categories for *vagina* are also more negative than those for *penis*. As expected, data from participants aged 35-54 fits more into the categories established by Cameron (1992), while participants aged 18-34 generated novel terms that often referred to contemporary culture, such as Gyrados’ Bubblebeam and sonic screwdriver. Females generated more terms for *vagina*, yet contrary to the results in Cameron (1992), there was no gender difference in the number of terms for *penis*. Terms for *vagina* from women mostly fell into the category of PERSONAL TERMS, which include nicknames given to

genitalia such as 'Judy' or 'Princess pussy,' while men offered more terms of 'desirability' such as 'nectar of the Gods' or 'buried treasure.' Dissimilar to Cameron (1992), the majority of terms for *penis* were categorized into either WEAPONS or TOOLS. These include terms such as 'Hammer of Thor' or 'Destroyer of worlds.'

The results suggest that many of the gender boundaries that the third wave of feminism has tried to break down persist in the terms for *penis* and are also present in the terms for *vagina*. Lakoff's (1987) conceptual metaphor PHYSICAL APPEARANCE IS PHYSICAL FORCE, which he suggests is encompassed in the "logic of rape," also surfaces in the data from this study. More importantly, this sexism occurs in the terms provided by both males and females.

## References

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